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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002708

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADJUSTED TAGS)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: CONFIDANTE TO SUNNI ARAB VICE PRESIDENT BLASTS PM  
MALIKI

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Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Robert S. Ford for reasons  
1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: A senior advisor to (Sunni) Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi complained August 21 that Prime Minister Maliki, emboldened by the success of this spring's security operations in Basra and Sadr City, was increasingly dropping the pretense of partnership with the ruling coalition's Sunni bloc to consolidate the power of his own Shi'a Da'wa cadres. Recent "anti-terrorist" operations in Diyala governorate were intended to emasculate the province's Sunni political class, he charged. He described efforts to integrate Anbar province's Sunni Awakening militias into the Iraqi Security Forces as "putting the fox in charge of the henhouse." He even asserted that Iran was working to counter U.S. influence among Sunni tribes by providing funding of its own to some Sahwa elements. Abdul Rahman also predicted slow progress on the Strategic Framework negotiations, maintaining that Prime Minister Maliki was too beholden to the Iranians to sign the deal. End Summary.

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Anti-Terror Campaign's Real Target: Sunni Rivals  
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¶2. (C) Saifaldin Abdul Rahman (strictly protect), a senior political advisor to (Sunni) Vice President Hashemi, fulminated about the August 19 Iraqi Security Forces' assault on the office of the Governor of Diyala (ref A) during an August 21 conversation with poloff. Abdul Rahman said the Vice President did not accept Prime Minister Maliki's claim that the special operations unit which conducted the raid had done so without orders. "This unit is controlled directly by the Prime Minister's office, and it is not credible that they would have taken such a step without approval," he stated. He also dismissed the PM's call for an "investigative committee" co-chaired by the Ministers of Defense and Interior as a "protocol response."

¶3. (C) Abdul Rahman believed the raid, and all of "Operation Benevolent Diyala," ostensibly an anti-terrorism sweep, were actually intended to clear the field of political opponents of the Maliki government in advance of provincial elections. Of approximately 600 detainees netted during the two week long operation, 76 members of the Vice President's Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) had been arrested. "If the government thinks we, the IIP, are terrorists, they should say so openly and we will prepare an appropriate political response," he stated.

¶4. (C) Abdul Rahman expressed general bitterness on the part of Vice President Hashemi's office toward Prime Minister Maliki. "It is no exaggeration to say that without our (VP

Hashemi's) support for the PM during the March ISF operation against Shi'ite militias in Basra and Sadr City, the government would have fallen and the operation would have failed," he maintained. Maliki, rather than returning the favor with gestures that might strengthen Sunni-Shi'a cooperation in the GOI, instead exploited his strengthened hand by seeking to consolidate the grip of his Da'wa party and thwart potential rivals.

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Sahwa-ISF: Putting the Fox in Charge of the Henhouse  
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¶5. (C) Abdul Rahman was morose about the implications of integrating the Sunni Awakening (Sahwa) movement into the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). "This is putting the fox in charge of the henhouse," he recalled parliament member Ali Adeeb, who is from Prime Minister Maliki's Da'wa Party and a close confidante of the PM himself, stating. Adeeb, Abdul Rahman recalled, also said in recent public remarks that "we will not allow the Sahwa to continue as it was." (Comment: PM Maliki's political advisor, Sadiq Rikabi, was distinctly unenthusiastic about integrating large numbers of Sunni Arab tribesmen into the Iraqi security forces, or even paying them at all, during an August 21 conversation with us. End Comment.)

¶6. (C) Any integration of the Sahwa into the Shi'a-dominated ISF would come at the expense of Sunni Sahwa commanders, who would almost certainly not be placed in positions of authority, he asserted. The GOI is already treating many Anbar Sahwa commanders like bandits, rather than the heroes who routed al-Qaida from the province, he suggested. A further complicating factor, Abdul Rahman asserted, was Iran, which was beginning to fund Sahwa elements on its own to counter U.S. influence among Anbar's Sunni tribes. Abdul Rahman recalled senior Iranian revolutionary guard official

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Mohammed Ja'fari admitting as much during a discussion in the spring of 2008. "Some of the tribes came to us seeking financial support, and we provided it," Abdul Rahman recalled Ja'fari stating.

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Strategic Framework: Don't Hold Your Breath  
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¶7. (C) Abdul Rahman was downbeat about the prospects for completing a Strategic Framework Agreement. "There is no real political will" in the GOI to reach an agreement, he asserted. Pressed to explain, Abdul Rahman maintained that the the Sunni bloc would be the least problematic group. The real obstacle, he continued, was in the Prime Minister's office. Maliki was under "considerable pressure" from Iran not to sign a deal, he claimed, predicting the Prime Minister would continue to drag his feet.

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Comment  
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¶8. (C) Some people around Hashimi have told us that Hashimi's relations with Maliki are better now that they used to be. However, Abdul Rahman is a longstanding Embassy contact, and his views likely reflect those of Vice President Hashemi and hint that long-festering suspicions lay not far below the surface. We note that his comments regarding PM Maliki ) including those characterizing recent actions in Diyala ) track closely with those expressed recently by Kurdish members of Maliki's parliamentary alliance (septel). Such sentiments indicate that while PM Maliki is acting in an increasingly self-confident and assertive manner, his actions produce significant backlash among his political partners, both Kurds and Sunni Arabs. End Comment.

